

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

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Mr. Butler R. Wilson, Boston.

April 19, 1915.

TO OUR BRANCHES AND LOCALS:

The cuts which have been made in the moving picture play, "The Birth of a Nation", which is founded on Dixon's "Clansman", are unimportant. The two particularly objectionable scenes, showing a white girl committing suicide to escape from a Negro pursuer, and a mulatto politician trying to force marriage upon the daughter of his white benefactor, still remain in the second part.

Kindly remember in whatever action you may take against this film that the National Board of Censorship is an unofficial body having no authority or power.

Very truly yours,

M. C. Nerney

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May 18, 1915.

Mrs. Beatrice Cannady,
520 East 26th Street, North,
Portland, Ore.

My dear Mrs. Cannady:

In reply to your letter of May 9

we are shipping you under separate cover fifty of our reports and enclose bill for transportation. We have also sent you under separate cover five membership pins as you requested. Enclosed is our receipt for one dollar and twenty-five cents in payment for them.

Success to you in your protests against the moving picture play, "The Birth of a Nation". You will be glad to hear that we had a telegram from Chicago stating that the Mayor there forbade its production. I have written them for the exact facts and will forward them to you that you may use them in your fight there.

With best wishes,

Cordially yours,

Mary Childs Nerney

MCN/RR

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April 7, 1915.

TO OUR BRANCHES AND LOCALS:

Is the moving picture play, "The Birth of a Nation", based on Dixon's "Clansman", being played in your city? If not, is it advertised for production and on what date?

Has your city or state a local censoring committee or board. If so, send us immediately their names and addresses.

Has your city an ordinance regulating the production of moving pictures. What is it?

If the play is being produced or is advertised for production in your city you should immediately interest the local clergy, colored and white, civic organizations, welfare societies, secret societies, women's clubs, etc., to unite with you in a protest. Letters signed by representatives of the branch and of these organizations should be sent to the Police Commissioner, to the License Commissioner and to the Mayor protesting against the play on the ground that it endangers public morals and may lead to a breach of the peace. Call attention to the fact that its prototype, "The Clansman" was stopped by executive order of Mayor Weaver in Philadelphia four years ago that the Mayor was sustained in his opinion by Judge Sulzberger of the Court of Common Pleas. It was also stopped in Boston. We can send you a copy of the Philadelphia decision.

In New York, at the request of this Association, Mayor Mitchel received a large delegation representing all elements among the colored people and many prominent white people and organizations interested in suppressing this play. After listening to the speakers the Mayor said he had seen the play, that he agreed with all that had been said against it, and that he had advised the owner of the theatre and the owner and producer of the film that the most objectionable scenes must be cut out. These are the two rape scenes in the second part which represent a colored man attacking a white girl and a mulatto politician trying to force marriage upon the daughter of his white benefactor.

An amateur organization in New York known as the National Board of Censorship, approved, then disapproved and again approved this play. It is an unofficial body without authority or power and is now split in two factions as a result of their disagreement over this film. Their

Branches....2.

Chairman, Dr. Frederic C. Howe, who is also Commissioner of Immigration, and such important members as Dr. Charles S. Macfarland, General Secretary of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, are vehement in their open denunciation of the play, and Dr. Howe appeared before the Mayor with our Association to speak against it. He is also one of our witnesses in the legal case which we have brought against the owner and producer.

The following are some opinions of the play: Dr. Jacques Loeb, the eminent scientist, characterizes it as follows: "The play is in my opinion a glorification of homicidal mania with a special grievance against the Negro. It is an insult to this country to call that display of scenes of murder and its appeal to race hatred 'The Birth of a Nation.'"

Miss Jane Addams who witnessed the production at our request, in speaking of its historical value, says, "One of the most unfortunate things about this film is that it appeals to race prejudice upon the basis of conditions of half a century ago, which have nothing to do with the facts we have to consider today. It is both unjust and untrue. The producer seems to have followed the principle of gathering the most vicious and grotesque individuals he could find among colored people, and showing them as representatives of the truth about the entire race. The same method could be followed to smirch the reputation of any race."

A writer in the New Republic of March 20 says, "Whatever happened during Reconstruction, this film is aggressively vicious and defamatory. It is spiritual assassination. It degrades the censors that passed it and the white race that endures it."

You should act at once. Make a special effort to secure the cooperation of all elements of colored people and prominent white people.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Childs Nerney

PORTLAND BRANCH OF THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

RECEIVED
JUN 22 1915
H. R. ALBEE,
MAYOR

PORTLAND, OREGON



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E. D. Cannady, Chairman, 703 Rothchild Bldg.
E. J. Minor
Mrs. J. W. Payne

PORTLAND, OREGON, June 21, 1915.

Mayor H. R. Albee,
Portland, Oregon.

Honorable Sir:

We, the Executive Committee of the Portland Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, by the request of our combined associations consisting of over ten thousand members, do hereby register a protest against the exhibition of the photo play "The Birth of a Nation" which we understand will be shown in this City in the near future at a local theater. "The Birth of a Nation" is written by Thomas Dixon and is founded upon his "Clansman" and is a very vicious play designed to create prejudice and race hatred against the colored people.

We therefore kindly request you to view this picture with the Censor Board and use your influence to prevent the exhibition of same.

Enclosed you will find a few clippings which we urge you to read and if necessary we can furnish you with information which will prove conclusively the reasons why this photo play should not be allowed to be exhibited.

Believing you to be a fair and impartial justice-loving Christian gentlemen, we appeal to you in behalf of not only the colored people of this City but the colored race at large to prohibit the exhibition of this vicious photo play. A very early reply is very anxiously awaited.

J. A. Merriman

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Mrs. E. D. Cannady

Secretary.

F. D. Young

Chairman Executive Committee.

J. Hamill Webster

E. G. Diepens

J. G. Bell

Executive Committee.

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Official Reporter